

Obituary: Richard F. Wilkey (1925–1995)

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Richard F. Wilkey in 1993.

Richard (Dick) F. Wilkey was a talented and innovative preparator of insect and mite specimens on microscope slides. The more than 1,000,000 specimens that he prepared during his career are highly prized by researchers and identifiers alike because they are the best for studying the minute structures that are so important in diagnosing species. Richard also was dedicated to 4-H (a training program for children and young adults) and had a major positive impact on the more than 400 students that he taught about insects over the 40 years that he served as part of the 4-H program.

Richard Wilkey died 29 Oct 1995 in Bluffton, Indiana. He was born 14 Aug 1925 in Providence, Rhode Island, to Frank K. and Laura A. Plummer Wilkey. He made his first insect collection when he was six, creating an interest in things entomological that lasted a lifetime.

He moved to Indianapolis, Indiana, when he was 12 and following high school graduation served three years during World War II with U.S. Armed Forces in the Pacific Campaign. Following the war he married Dorothy Weber and moved to Lafayette, Indiana, where he earned a B.S. degree in entomology at Purdue University in 1950. He received his M.S. degree in entomology at Colorado State University in 1951. During this period he developed a life-long interest in micro-

scopic organisms and their preparation. While at Purdue he did an undergraduate project on Collembolla. His Master's thesis continued in this vein as an analysis of the springtails of Larimer County, Colorado. When in later years his focus changed to groups other than springtails, he turned over his collection, including specimens of nearly 50 undescribed species and a dozen new genera, to Kenneth Christiansen, Grinnell College, Grinnell, Iowa.

Wilkey began his professional career in 1951 with the Mexican Cotton Company in Baja California, Mexico, working on pests of cotton. Later that year he was hired by the Santa Clara County, County Agricultural Commissioner's Office where he worked for a year. He then was promoted and moved to San Diego where he did quarantine identifications for three years for the State of California, Department of Agriculture. In Sacramento he finally obtained the job he wanted most: taxonomist responsible for Homoptera identification (except aphids) also working for the State of California. In this position he became recognized world wide for his knowledge of scale insect systematics.

Wilkey often helped colleagues in other states such as Florida, Washington, and Arizona with difficult identifications. Following the death of Howard McKenzie he served as the point person for visitors working with the "Ferris-McKenzie" scale insect collection at the University of California at Davis. In 1971, after a distinguished career with the California Department of Agriculture, he retired early and returned to Bluffton, Indiana. Here Wilkey began a new career. He started Arthropod Slidemounts, a mail order business that supplied arthropods to clientele needing a diverse array of well prepared specimens. The primary clientele were high schools and colleges, but he frequently provided specimens at a nominal fee for Extension short courses, pest control operator training, the food industry, and 4-H programs. During this period he developed a set of tools for micro-manipulation of specimens under the dissecting microscope, which most users believe are the best of their kind. After another 20 year career, in 1991 he retired and sold his business to BioQuip Products.

Richard F. Wilkey was an energetic, enthusiastic, and caring human being who was most comfortable working behind the scenes. Within entomology it is difficult to pick one area among his many accomplishments as the most important, and when consideration is given to his commitment to entomology in 4-H, and his leadership in other community activities the choice becomes even more difficult.

We suspect that after all is said and done, the nearly 1,000,000 perfect, or nearly perfect, arthropod slide mounts that Richard prepared will be the accomplishment that will have the most permanent and important impact. Certainly in our own research it is the beautifully cleared and stained Wilkey preparations that we seek out whenever available. Studying them, it is easy to correctly ascertain the position and structure of morphological features and make accurate determinations, illustrations, and descriptions.

The largest concentrations of Wilkey slides are in the collections of the California Department of Food and Agriculture in Sacramento and the Bohart Museum at the University of California at Davis. He also took on the task of slide mounting the dry scale insect type material of Gordon Floyd Ferris and distributing it to the major museums of the world. This material is especially useful because it is of better quality than preparations made by Ferris himself and is present in collections such as the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural

History at Beltsville, Maryland and The Natural History Museum in London, where only limited Ferris material was available previously.

Wilkey also contributed significantly as a teacher. He taught others his slide mounting techniques and was a behind-the-scenes coorganizer and teacher in all seven Coccidology short courses at the University of Maryland. In this role he taught over 100 students from around the world how to properly slide-mount scale insects. He also used his broad entomological knowledge and extraordinary enthusiasm to encourage hundreds of 4-H'ers to learn about insects. He was involved in 4-H for 40 years and during that time taught more than 400 students about insects. Through his teaching and enthusiasm, approximately 10 of these students have pursued careers in entomology. Recently, in recognition of contributions to 4-H and the community, he and wife Dorothy were chosen Grand Marshals of the Wells County 4-H parade, an important annual affair in the Wells County area, and he was the Wells County, Indiana, Citizen of the Year in 1994. He was a past board member of the Wells County Society for Crippled Children and Adults, the Bluffon Park Board, the Rivergreenway Project, Public Library Board, and member of Friends of the Library and Bluffon Lions Club.

He is survived by wife, Dorothy Weber Wilkey of Bluffon, Indiana; three sons, John R. and Frank J. of Hayden Lake, Idaho, and David A. of Washington, D.C.; a sister Nancy Thut of Fairfield, Connecticut, and two grandchildren.

Received 10 Feb 1997; Accepted 1 Apr 1997.